

COMPARATIVE REMARKS ON TWO PROJECTED COMMUNICATIONS WITH LAKE HURON.

In no point of view is the Rideau Canal of more essential value to Canada, than as a successful experiment on the practicability of adapting her Lakes and Rivers to Steam navigation, by which means the expense and difficulty of excavation may be avoided, and water communication procured in situations where it might be otherwise unattainable.

Her navigable streams are so numerous that she has only to choose for improvement them that will contribute most to her advantage, and the peculiar situation she occupies, being directly between the Ocean and the most extensive body of Lakes yet discovered on the face of the Globe, will enable her to turn that inland navigation to a purpose which must greatly increase her influence and prosperity. She may hold the Key of the internal Western Commerce by forming easy access from the interior to her own Sea-ports.

It is, therefore, on the judicious application of her physical advantages to this object, that her future prosperity will chiefly depend.

There are two lines of navigable Waters through Canada, capable of being converted into communications with Lake Huron. One on the direction of the Ottawa to Montreal, to accomplish which, and settle the adjoining country, a Company is now forming in England and Ireland on a very broad and substantial basis. The other is by Lake Simcoe, the Shallow Lakes and River Trent, to Lake Ontario, in reference to which, Resolutions have issued from a meeting of the inhabitants of that quarter.

Dazzled by the local advantages which may result from the undertaking, they seem to have lost sight of a most important point, which a more enlarged national view of the subject might have led them to contemplate. At first sight the measure appears to have so much the same object, that almost the only question seems to be, which is most practicable; but upon closer inspection they will be found of very different character, in respect to their future bearing and effect on the general interests of the country.

A commercial communication by the Ottawa, being through its whole line so distant from the frontier, and so much shorter than any Route which the Americans can command from New York to the Upper Lakes, must ensure a great proportion of their trade to Montreal, and prove her great counterbalance against the local advantages which New-York possesses in other respects. But if the communication be made by Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario, nothing would be gained, and much might be lost. We should merely reach the same point to which the Welland Canal already leads—the lower end of Lake Ontario, where a choice may be made between New-York, by Oswego, or Montreal, by the St. Lawrence. It is, no doubt, true that the new route would be shorter and safer, but so much the worse in a national point of view; for we should only hold out the stronger temptation to the Americans to enlarge their Canal from Oswego to Albany, which they have already in contemplation, and which they will, no doubt, place on such a footing as to make the expense of transit within the limits of the charges on our St. Lawrence Canal, (should it ever be completed,) so that the chance of any trade from the American side of the Lakes, by the Simcoe route, will be reduced to the comparative state of the markets at Montreal and New-York.

In order fully to illustrate a case so immensely important to the country, it may be necessary to state it more geographically.

Our local advantage consists in the great winding in the chain of the Lakes, in the extraordinary extension of Lake Huron to the Eastward, and in that of Lake Erie to the Westward. The Americans have opened a communication to Lake Erie, the second in the chain of about five hundred miles to their chief Sea-port. We have it in our power, by an interior communication along the Ottawa of about four hundred and fifty miles from Montreal, to enter the third Lake (the Huron) at a point six hundred miles more advanced in our American Mediterranean. Thus we can reach that central position where the Lakes Huron, Michigan and Superior may be said to meet, by a route little exceeding five hundred miles, whereas the Americans must wind their tedious way eleven or twelve hundred miles to the same point. Let the Isthmus between Lakes Huron and Ontario be once penetrated by a navigation, and our advantageous ground is lost, a direct inlet is unfolded from Oswego to the Huron, and thus assisted, the maritime advantages of New-York would no doubt absorb from all rivals the trade of the West.

Those who are interested in the improvements on the St. Lawrence, may suppose that a Cut by Lake Simcoe would materially increase their revenue, but they may find themselves greatly mistaken. It might, and in all probability would, have a contrary effect. The Americans would then have the strongest and most substantial inducements, as already remarked, to enlarge the Canal from Oswego to Albany; and, if necessary to secure the trade, they might throw it entirely free of toll. It would not be too great a sacrifice for the object we should, by a needless act, present to them; and it is a sacrifice which their great resources and freedom from debt would enable them to make without financial inconvenience.

The accommodation given to our neighbours by the Welland Canal, on their passage to Oswego, is unavoidable, there being no other way of forming a navigable communication with our own side of Lake Erie. But in the present case we are under no such necessity, for we can command a line to Lake Huron of which no rival could take any advantage. Were there no other means of reaching Lake Huron, by a short or direct route, but by Lake Simcoe, something might be said in favor of the measure. If the high, barren ridge which girds the lands along the waters of the Trent, were the northern confines of the fertile lands of Canada, we might submit, as we have been obliged to do on the Welland Canal, to divide the facilities of our approach to Lake Huron with our neighbours. But the case is wonderfully different when we consider that an immense body of fertile land lies beyond, or to the northward of that ridge, through which the great river of the Ottawa flows, forming nearly of itself a spacious and unbroken navigable communication to the very heart of the country from Lake Huron to Montreal, which must always be considered, from its local situation, the commercial focus of both the Canadas.

The enterprising spirit of the people of the United States has been often noticed, and I am verily persuaded that they would most readily provide the necessary funds for a communication by Lake Simcoe on the largest scale. They would thank us for the permission to do so, and chuckle at our simplicity. It would complete for them a ready and direct highway from New-York to their immense and fertile North Western possessions, and we should thus have the honor of crowning the grand object of their enlightened citizen, De Witt Clinton, in a more perfect manner than his most sanguine views could ever have anticipated. I again repeat, that the essential advantage which Canada may derive from her situation, would be entirely

by a Cut across the isthmus between Lake Huron and Ontario. She would then become a more thoroughfare from the Upper Lakes to the Gulf of New York, instead of being herself their market and outlet to the ocean. Our shipping prospects would be disappointed, and Canada would be isolated, by her own hands, from the commanding position on which nature had placed her. Trade between England and America, between the Atlantic and the Pacific, is singularly striking. An opening other than that by the St. Lawrence, the junction between them being facilitated by Lake Michigan and the French River, is the only practicable means by which the commercial advantages from the interior can be fully obtained and secured to Canada. On the other hand an opening by Lake Huron is the only possibility by which the sea can be deprived of them. At that point alone is Canada vulnerable. It is not possible to open a communication in any other direction over the whole surface of the American Continent this could hurt her. In that direction only can a choke be opened to divert from her the commanding influence of her situation. This will, perhaps, be called illiberal policy, but if our liberality should lead us to cut at our own neck and find consequences, and to furnish our commercial rivals with such essential facilities, when it is perfectly in our power to preserve them for our own use, it will certainly be a liberality far above the common standard. It would be the liberality of a madman squandering his inheritance. It would be a most unnecessary sacrifice of all the advantages attached to the original formation of Canada—a waste and dissipation of his inheritance.

It is therefore it is startling to advance the expediency of checking a local improvement in any part of the country, and nothing but the strength and singular nature of the case can justify the suggestion.

In the policy of all civilized nations, private interest must give way to public welfare; but here the very reverse would take place, in a most remarkable degree. The public interest would be sacrificed, not in fact so much for the benefit of even a small portion of our own population, as for the benefit of our neighbour, distant facility might still be given with propriety and safety, to the settlers in that section of the country, for the conveyance of their produce to market, by improving the River Trent, and by forming a chain of navigation through the Shallow Lakes. But surely any further advantage which would accrue to them, by an entry to Lake Huron in that direction, would be as small dust in the balance, against its harmful consequences to the Colony, holding in her own right, and also as a branch of the British Empire, separate and distinct interests from the United States.

It is only necessary to look at the form and nature of the country to be convinced that the Resolutions of the meeting at Peterborough will apply with much more propriety to a communication by the Ottawa, than to the line which they have been, naturally enough, led to propose.

The line by the Ottawa is at a greater distance from the frontier, and embraces a far greater extent of country, laying open a much larger field for settlement, and also for the lumber trade, of which the Ottawa is now the principal seat, and must continue to be so, the country penetrated by that river and its tributaries being incomparably larger and more abundant in timber than any other lumbering region in Canada.

For the purpose of a military highway, the line by the Ottawa would be greatly superior, for the other has no connexion whatever with the Rideau Canal, being cut off from it by an exposed navigation on Lake Ontario to the Bay of Quinte of fifty or sixty miles, and therefore it would still "be liable to be interrupted at any moment by the neighbouring states."

The Cut by Lake Simcoe would do very little towards improving the shape of the country. It is still too near the frontier to take from it the character of "a weak and narrow strip." But the line by the Ottawa would bound a great portion of its habitable lands. It would enclose the country, and give to the Upper Province a body and a shape that would really and effectually increase its strength and stability.

The five millions of acres of land spoken of as lying north of the Home and Newcastle Districts, must be the identical tract through which the junction of the Ottawa with Lake Huron would be formed, and with which it is more immediately connected, being separated from the Shallow Lakes by a high ridge of rocky country, as has been ascertained by two exploring parties of the Engineers sent out by Government.

With regard to the comparative expense of the two lines, their natural facilities are, perhaps, nearly equal. The navigation however of the first one hundred and twenty miles from Montreal is already completed on the Ottawa, extending to Bytown, and if the expense of improving the St. Lawrence be added, as it must be, to that of the improvement from the Bay of Quinte upwards, in calculating the whole outlay on that line, it must be found to exceed greatly the sum which would be required to open a magnificent navigation from Bytown to Lake Huron, a distance of little, if any, more than three hundred miles.

And the expense of the different lines can have no weight at all in a question involving national considerations of infinitely more importance than any amount of money which could be required to execute both.

Canada, while balancing these measures, stands on most critical ground. She can now embrace an opportunity of consolidating an inland trade, which would raise her to the highest pitch of commercial prosperity, or she may lose it for ever, merely by the choice she makes between the two communications in question. She may furnish the mother country with a direct avenue for her commerce to the very heart of this continent; and be likewise its perpetual physical barrier against all foreign intrusion or interference, provided the Country be not so put up by local interests as to defeat those great objects.

Mr. Wright, of New York, a distinguished Engineer, who was employed by our Government Commissioners, to examine and report on the Welland Canal, makes frequent allusion to the jealousy and apprehensions entertained in the States of their Western trade being diverted from New-York to Montreal and Quebec, and it is not to be wondered at, that with their eyes open to its future importance, they should look around them for the means of preserving it. Mr. Wright says, "North of the 37th degree of Latitude, from State of the Rocky Mountains is a vast expanse of Country, capable of sustaining a population of fifty millions, and which in twenty-five years will have a population of more than ten millions. With this large and healthy increase of population, adjacent to the shores of the Upper Lakes and their tributaries, to what direction shall we look for an outlet for their surplus products?"

It will therefore give the Americans direct access to Lake Huron through our own territory, (which if we secure Cut by Lake Simcoe we cannot withhold from them,) and thereby enable them to avoid the circuitous and often dangerous route of Lake Erie, they have only to enlarge their Canal from Oswego to any arbitrary degree, and to reduce its tolls to the lowest minimum, to grasp that immense internal trade, which such a population must create.

Whereas if the opening to those Countries be made by the Ottawa, no improvement on their side could diminish, or by an effort could they wrest from us that commercial supremacy, over a vast portion of the Central territory, which that important river, and it alone, can give, and secure to us.

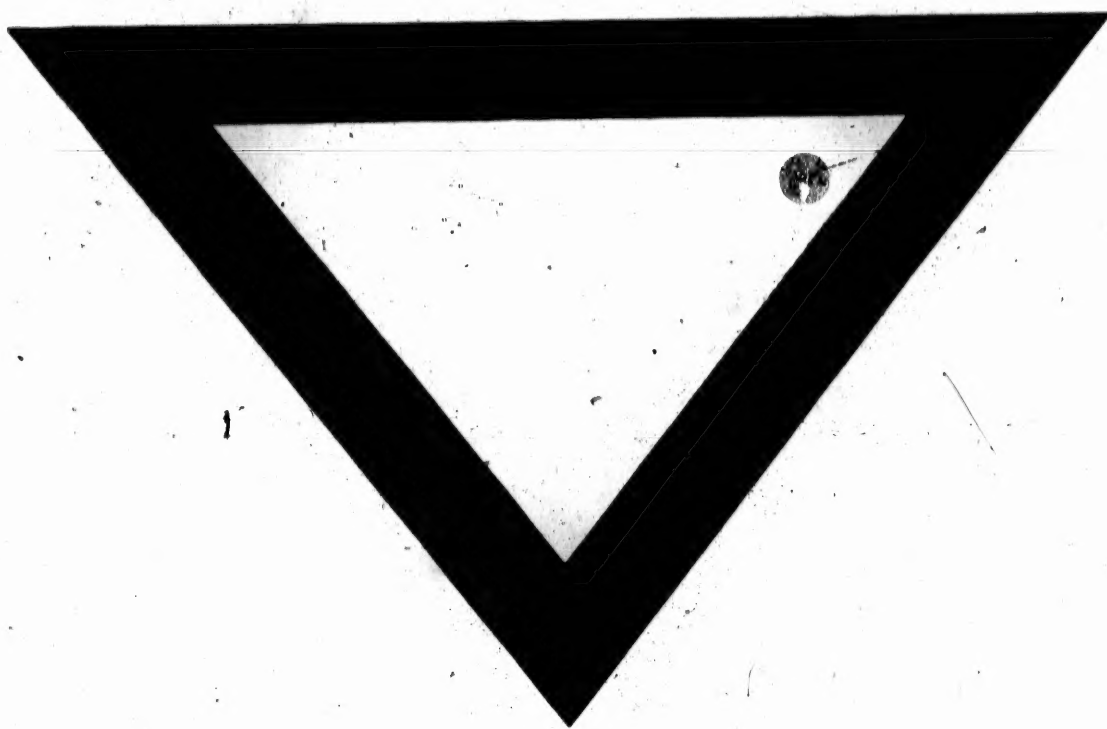
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C. Sherriff



Complaisant Remarks
on
Conversations & Late Hours
1755.



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